

Virginia's Program
for the
Visually Handicapped

By JOHN B. CUNNINGHAM



EXECUTIVE OFFICES, 3003 PARKWOOD AVE., RICHMOND, VA.

Published at the request of the
VIRGINIA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND



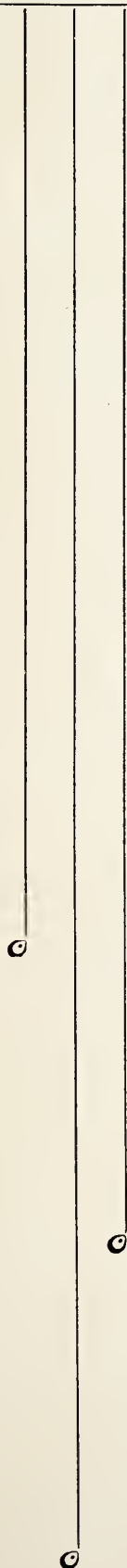
AMERICAN FOUNDATION
FOR THE BLIND INC.

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FOREWORD

At least one person in every thousand is blind. Four blind persons out of every five have lost their sight when past the free school age. The idea of educating blind children by special methods is about as old as the practice of a public school system, and all of the forty-eight states besides all of the territories of the United States have made provision, generally through a residential school in each state, for the special education of blind children. Citizens are aware of the existence of such schools, and Virginians in particular may feel proud that their State was one of the pioneers in this field of education, the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind having been established at Staunton as long ago as 1839.

What the average citizen does not so readily realize is that four blind persons out of every five have lost their sight when past the free school age, and therefore, that the State's problem of what to do with and for its blind people is not solved through a school which can serve only one blind person in five. Few people are "born blind." Infantile diseases and accidents, chiefly ophthalmia neonatorum, (baby's sore eyes), are the feeders for your State school for the blind. But four-fifths of the blind have suffered from accident or disease in adult life, and hence have not been touched by the State school for blind children. To meet the needs of these four out of every five blind persons in the State was the primary reason why there had to be such an institution as the Virginia Commission for the Blind. Twenty-seven other states now have such commissions.

The needs of these blinded adults are as variable as human beings are variable. Some individuals do not need or ask any service whatsoever from the State. But these fortunately endowed personalities are exceptional; it is rarely true that the blinded individual cannot or does not use one or another of the forms of assistance to the blind made available through the Commission. There are blinded laborers who must be taught a trade and put to work. There are people of professional or semi-professional training who, having gone blind, must be helped to re-adjust their lives. Some form of salesmanship is usually best for these. There are blinded men and women who, for certain reasons, must remain at home, and for these the home-teacher, with her instruction in Braille, sewing, and other handwork, must be the guardian angel. Talking book machines must be dispensed to those whose fondness for reading has not been dulled by the years which have too much numbed their fingers for reading Braille. Graduates of the State school in Staunton oftener than not are unable to find employment after leaving school; these are to be trained and placed as stenographers, as salesmen, or as workers at the practical trades according to their personal fitness. There are children with sight too poor for public school use, but too good for admission to a school for the blind; for these the Commission conducts classes in the public schools especially planned to conserve the child's eyesight. All over the State there are children who need an "eye-doctor", but who don't get one because they are too poor in purse or too poor in advisers. For these the Commission employs an ophthalmologist who conducts free eye-clinics throughout the State. Finally, there are those who, through old age or poor health or personal incompetence are debarred from

every avenue of self-help into which a blind man or woman might be led ; for these the Virginia Commission for the Blind is charged with administering the "Aid to the Blind" provisions of the Federal Social Security Act.

The Virginia Commission for the Blind was established by act of the Legislature in 1922. It is a board of seven members appointed by the Governor and serving without compensation. Their active staff is headed by Mr. L. L. Watts who has been the Commission's Executive Secretary since its founding in 1922. The Commission's offices and some of its training and industrial facilities are housed in a building at 3003 Parkwood Avenue, Richmond, deeded to the State by the Virginia Association of Workers for the Blind. The free use of this property was first donated to the Virginia Association of Workers for the Blind by Mr. Edwin J. Gould of New York. Later the Association purchased it on liberal terms from the Gould Foundation, and proceeded to deed it to the Commission. A valuable property has thus been acquired without a penny's cost to the State either for rent or purchase.

The purpose of this booklet is to set forth briefly, but concretely and in layman's language, the projects, the achievements, and the aims of the Commission. Moreover, the friends of the Commission have long felt that the true story of Mr. Watts and his work for the blind of Virginia, forms one of the thrilling chapters in the history of social service in the Old Dominion or indeed in the whole American scene. Though not designed as "propaganda" to any particular end, it is nevertheless hoped that, by enlightening the citizens as to what is being done and what may be done for the blind of Virginia, the following pages may promote a more general interest in this humanitarian cause which Mr. Watts and his staff with their numerous friends are now so commendably serving.

Virginia Workshop for the Blind

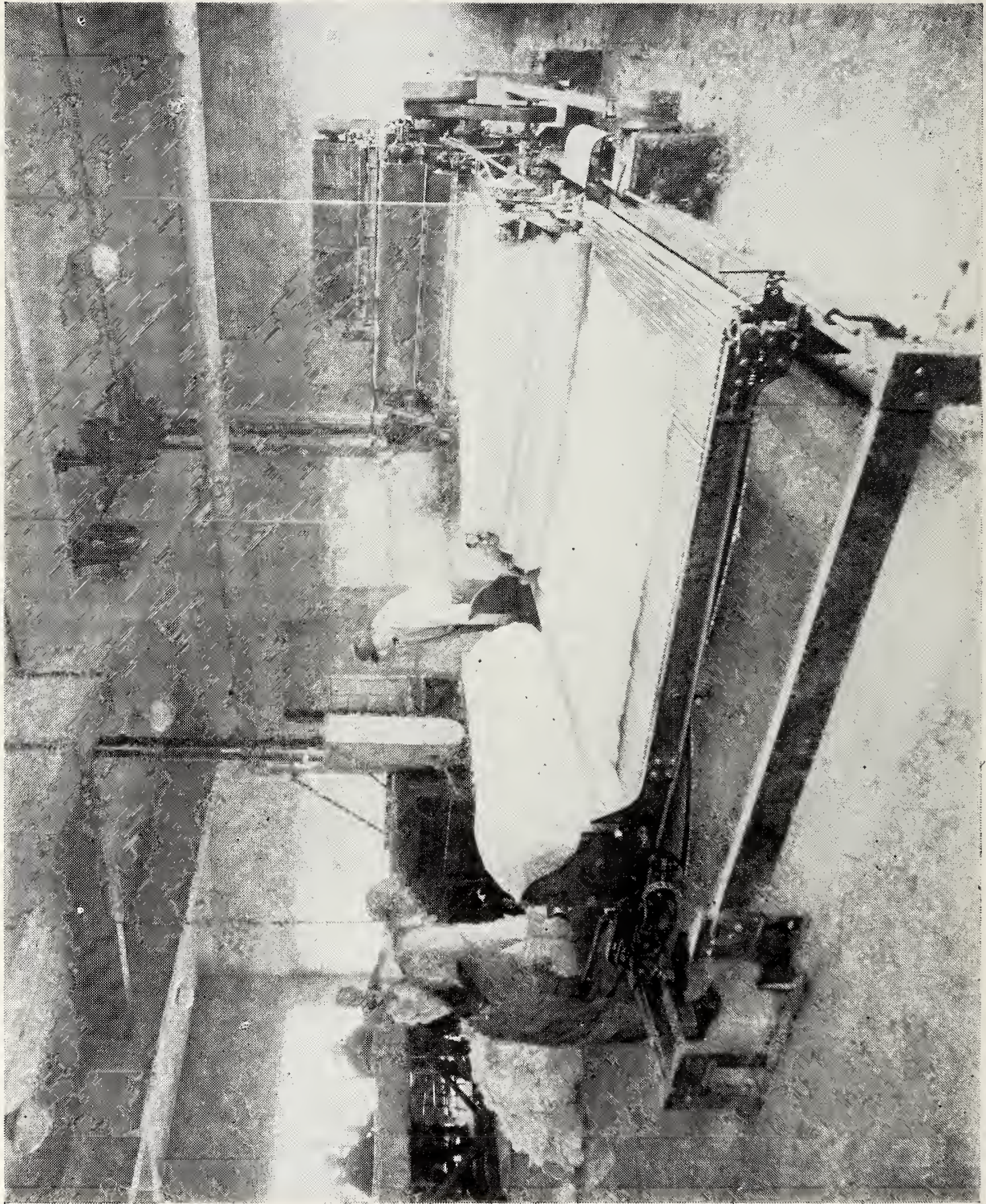
CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA



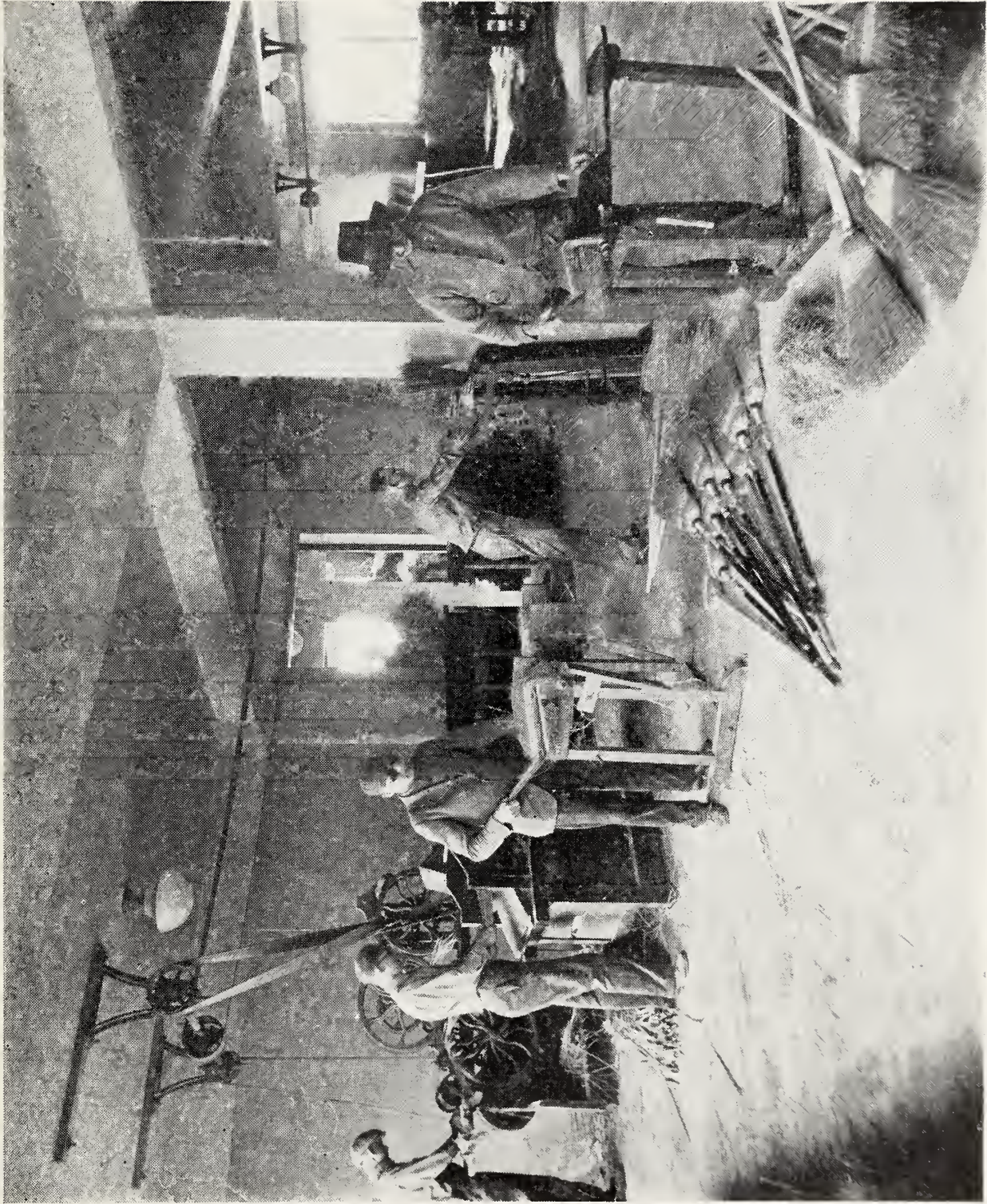
HOUSED in this modern, fire-proof structure on the Monticello Road, the Virginia Workshop for the Blind in Charlottesville is a State institution for the training and employment of blind men. It is not a home. Some of the men are married and make their homes in Charlottesville; others live in private boarding houses; all come daily to the Workshop as to any other factory or apprentice school.

The first emphasis is on the training of the men. They are taught to make brooms, to make or renovate mattresses, to weave willow baskets, and to re-seat chairs. These are the trades which long experience has shown to be best adaptable for the labor of hands in the dark. The duration of the training period varies with the individual trainee. On average it is about six months. Often the blind apprentice, having newly lost his sight, is himself timid and skeptical, and then it becomes the mission of the workshop, not only to teach him a trade, but first to give this man a gleam of renewed self-confidence—his initiation into the blind man's adventure of substituting hands for eyes.

When the apprentice has learned his trades, the next problem is his em-



MAKING MATTRESSES



MAKING BROOMS

ployment to earn his bread. Under ideal conditions, he would go back to his home community and set up a workshop of his own. A few decades ago this was entirely practicable, and there were many blind men who could make a fair living by selling hand-made brooms and mattresses on the local market and re-seating their neighbors' chairs. But nowadays it would be hard for him to compete with the prices afforded by mass production of brooms and mattresses. Besides, not every blinded laborer is capable of operating a business of his own, however small: he wasn't so endowed even when he could see. Hence, most of the trainees must become regular employees of the Virginia Workshop for the Blind itself.

Of the 27 blind men now in the shop, nine are in training and eighteen are full-time workers.

The workers are paid by "piece work" on a carefully figured scale. For example, on the "hand woven" type of chair caning where the cane is run through holes bored in the border of the chair, the standard price to the customer is three cents a hole. The blind worker at Charlottesville is paid two cents, and the other one cent is retained by the workshop to be applied on the cost of materials. Similarly, on rush seating, rattan seating, mattress filling, mattress threading, broom winding, broom stitching, the scale of payments is so worked out as to give the blind worker the majority-fraction of the intake after deducting the wholesale cost of materials plus the cost of hauling so obviously necessary in a business that handle such things as chairs, brooms, and mattresses. Does any one need to be told that the blind men do *not* drive the truck? But they *do* operate the electrical broom winders and broom stitchers with which the workshop is equipped.

Much of the business of the Workshop is in household orders; but for brooms and mattresses the Workshop fills some larger orders. Ever since its founding in 1925 it has supplied all the coach and office brooms used by the C. and O. railroad. It renovates all mattresses for the University of Virginia, has filled mattress contracts for V. M. I., Madison College, Shenandoah Academy, Augusta Military Academy, Staunton Military Academy, Fishburne, Fork Union, Miller School, College of William and Mary, Medical College of Virginia, Sweet Briar College, and Foxcroft School. Its production report for the year ending June 30, 1939, shows 2,703 mattresses made and renovated; 16 box springs made or re-upholstered; 26 wrestling mats made or reconditioned; 1,164 chairs re-seated; 382 pillows and cushions made or reconditioned; the manufacture of 1,985 dozen brooms, 16 door mats, and 210 willow baskets.

If this institution could be run solely as a Workshop and not as an apprentice's training school, it could operate without a deficit or might even show a profit, so its manager, Mr. W. S. Blair, thinks. But the primary function of the Workshop is to train men. The margin of loss which the State has to make up is now only about \$3,000.00 a year, which is a very small deficit indeed when it is remembered that each new trainee must waste a certain amount of material in learning the trades. Moreover, most of these men, if they had any money when they lost their sight, have spent it in the months of indigence that followed, and so the Virginia Commission for the Blind assumes the cost of their board and lodging during their apprenticeship. The cost of training a man is estimated at \$400.00. This training cost is what occasions the small annual deficit to the State. And yet there are well-meaning friends who have criticized the administration of the Workshop for not supplying the blind men with free cigarettes and free tickets to the theater.

History of the Workshop.—In November, 1924, the Virginia Association of Workers for the Blind, at the instigation of Mr. L. L. Watts, undertook to raise funds by private subscription for the establishment of the Virginia Workshop for the Blind. The campaign for funds, under Mr. Watts' direction, met with sufficient response to enable him to open the Workshop on August 4th, 1925. Charlottesville was selected as its site, partly because of its central location, but mainly because there was available in the town at that time a broom manufacturing plant of ideal capacity for starting the Workshop on a small scale. This plant was procured by the Association of Workers for the Blind and turned over to the Commission to be operated as a Workshop for the Blind. Later, as the institution expanded, Mr. Watts, through the Virginia Association of Workers for the Blind, procured the funds by private subscription with which to construct a modern plant, and on January 1st, 1931, the Workshop moved into its present excellent and handsome plant on the Monticello Road. In 1934, by special act of the Legislature, the State purchased this plant from the Virginia Association of Workers for the Blind. The State, through the Commission, assumed the Workshop's bonded indebtedness of some \$34,000 and thus acquired a property which, including land, building, and mechanical equipment, had cost the Association over \$100,000 raised by private subscription. The Commission now owns and operates the Workshop. Daily production reports, wage-payment reports, etc., are made from the Workshop to Mr. Watts' office in Richmond.

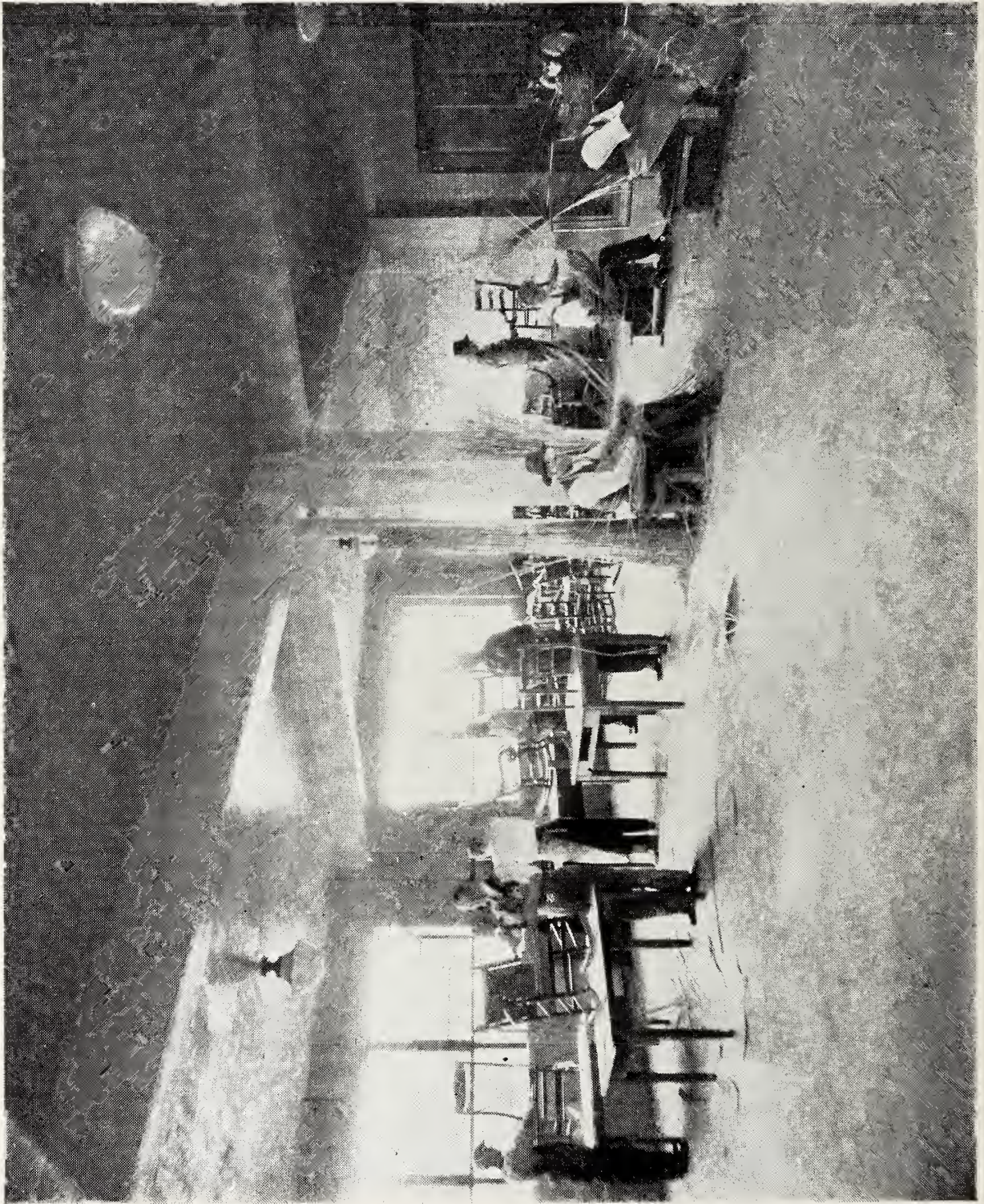
It should not be overlooked that this Workshop in Charlottesville is used by the Commission not only to train men in special trades, but in some measure to train men in adjusting themselves to blindness even though they may enter a totally different line of employment from those pursued at the shop. Six of the men trained at Charlottesville are operating canteens (vending machines). Three are operating news-stands. One is operating a service station in conjunction with his own private workshop.

Of those employed elsewhere but still pursuing the trades taught them at the Virginia Workshop for the Blind, twelve are operating small workshops of their own, making brooms and mattresses and reseating chairs. Five of those trained at Charlottesville are now employed in other work-



shops for the blind. Three are now regularly employed as mattress makers in State institutions—one at the Western State Hospital, one at "the Colony" in Amherst, and one at the Central State Hospital in Petersburg.

A Typical Case.—In 1924 the Commission's Field Agent, in making the census of the blind, found in Chesterfield County, a blind youth past twenty-one who had never been to school a day in his life. His parents through a mistaken notion of kindness to their blind child would not send him off to school. But despite all cramping influence at home, he retained his burning desire to learn something and to become self-dependent. When the Virginia Workshop for the Blind was opened, this Chesterfield



RESEATING CHAIRS AND MAKING WILLOW BASKETS



SORTING CORN FOR BROOMS

youth was one of the first trainees entered. He not only acquired the trades, but learned to read and write Braille which he should have been taught in childhood. After finishing his training and being employed for a while at the Workshop, Mr. Watts recommended this aggressive youth to the Western State Hospital as mattress maker, a job he has held ever since. Not only so, but, whereas most blind mattress makers have to get somebody else to sew their ticking for them, this dauntless fellow has bought himself a sewing machine and makes his own ticks.

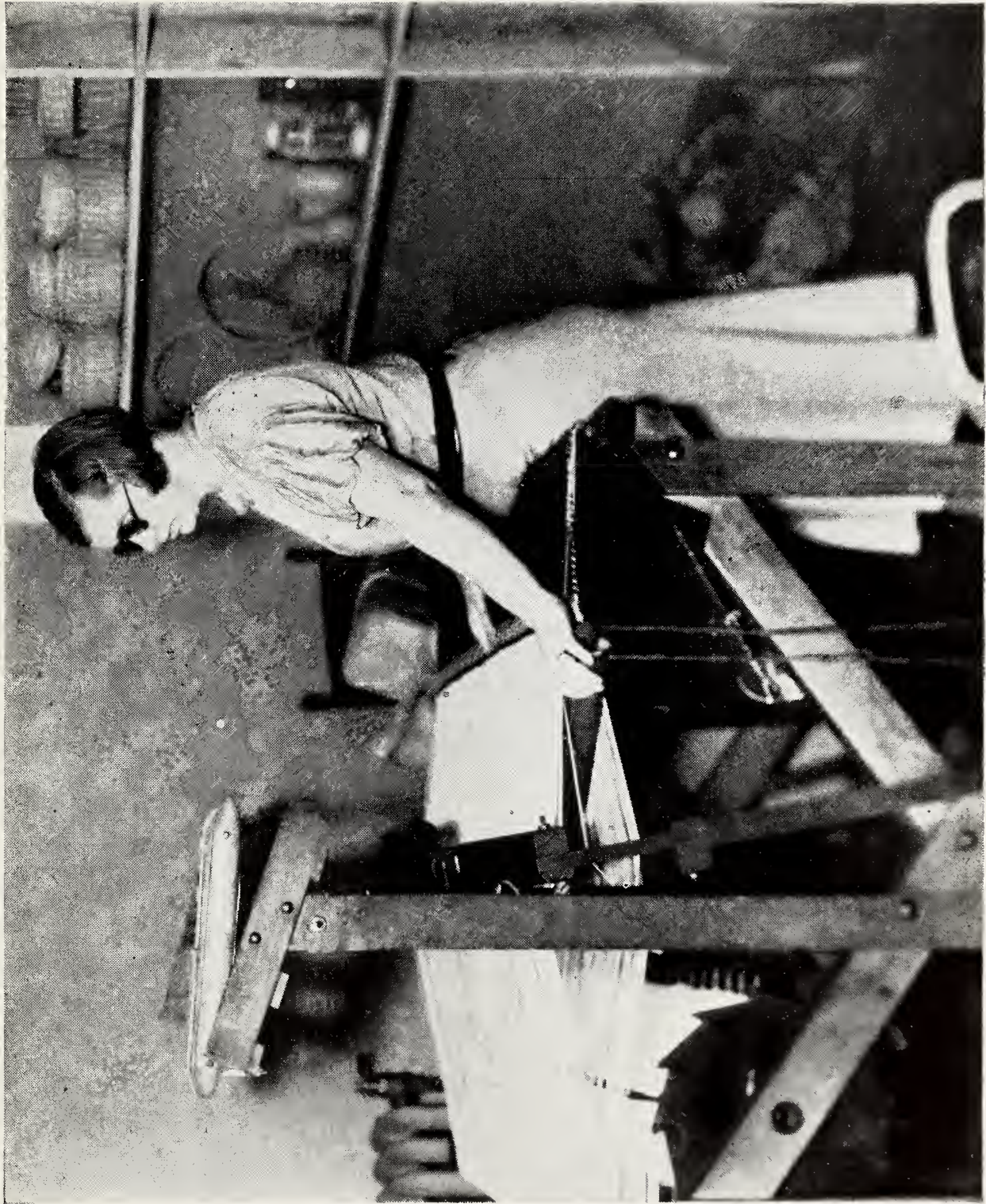
We called the above a "typical" case. Perhaps "typical" is not the word, for this youth was rather an exceptionally creditable case. "We never know what they'll do till we take them in and try them out," says Mr. W. S. Blair, manager and chief instructor at the Workshop. "Some of them come here, stay a while, and then just quit. Others take the full course, and then go home and do nothing. We can't make them take advantage of the training if they don't want to. But we are here to offer it to all who want it, and it is gratifying to realize how many this Workshop has benefited."

Home Teaching

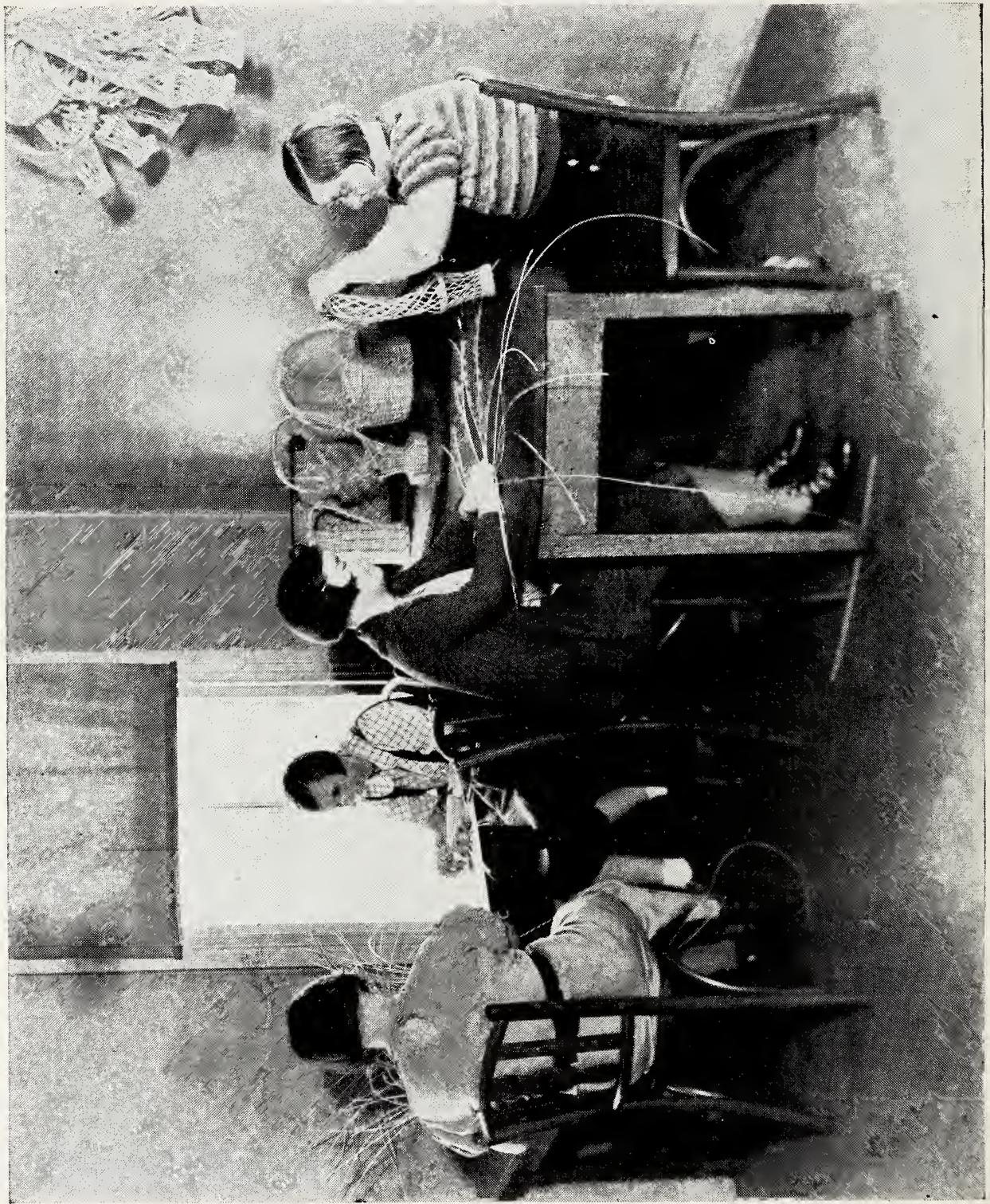
The Workshop in Charlottesville is the Commission's nucleus for training blind men. For the training and employment of blind women, the Commission's nucleus is its training school at 3003 Parkwood Avenue, Richmond, under the direction of Miss Margaret Hogan, supervisor of home teaching. Miss Hogan, herself blind, is a graduate of Barnard College, Columbia University, and came to her present work in Virginia following some years of experience in home teaching of the blind in New Jersey.

At the Richmond center the blind women and girls are taught rug weaving, knitting and crocheting, chair caning, and such other handicrafts as are adaptable to feminine "hands in the dark." Braille is taught to adults who have not attended a school for blind children. On average there are fifteen women and girls being trained or employed at this center. When a girl has completed her training (six months is the average training period) she may leave the center and ply her new handicrafts in her home. The Commission undertakes to market for her whatever she can make that is saleable, or a regular job may be found for her by the Commission's placement agent. One girl has been so placed as a stenographer in a Richmond office; one is operating a news-stand in the Richmond Post Office. Several girls trained at the Richmond center are now employed in workrooms for blind girls in other states. Several of the girls, on completion of their training, are kept at the center and employed in making articles which the Commission sells.

The marketing of these goods is done through special sales strategically placed, dated, advertised, and "staffed" by the Commission. When held in small communities the sale is usually under a local sponsorship, as of some church or parent-teachers group. Notable among these sales is the Commission's annual Christmas sale at 102 North Sixth Street, Richmond, of goods made by the blind. Ladies of Richmond, regardless of church affiliation, have been most helpful in the conduct of these sales, especially the committee from the Council of Jewish Women. What can blind women make that people will buy and use?



WEAVING RUGS



A CLASS IN REED BASKETRY

Among their "art weaving" products are purses, knitting bags, baskets, stools, and cotton-chenille rugs. In needlework, including knitted and crocheted articles, they make afghans, sweaters, baby jackets, scarfs, luncheon sets, aprons, children's aprons, dish towels, dish cloths, room and laundry bags, rag dolls. In leather goods they make belts of various types, key wallets, purses, bill folders, hand bags. Who threads the needle for the blind seamstress? She uses a "self-threading" needle. Helen Keller once boasted that she could "thread a needle in the dark," (rather, it was not a "boast"; it was a mere statement of fact).

Similar to but smaller than the center for blind women directed by Miss Hogan in Richmond is the center for blind women housed in rooms loaned by St. John's Episcopal Church, Lynchburg. Here the blind women and girls of Lynchburg and vicinity assemble three days a week for training and employment under the direction of Miss Gladys Cole. The Lynchburg Chapter of the Junior League of America has faithfully sponsored work for the blind in Lynchburg for a number of years. Junior Leaguers supply automobile transportation to the blind women daily between their homes and the workrooms at St. John's.

Home teaching among the colored has thus far been limited to Tidewater Virginia. Hattie Wills, a well-qualified blind colored woman, is employed by the Commission to teach the blind of her race. In the year ending June 30, 1939, she had given special instruction to 100 blind negroes in Tidewater Virginia, chiefly in Newport News, Norfolk, and Portsmouth.

At the center for blind women in Richmond the aim is to adapt the instructional facilities as far as possible to the special needs of the individual. For instance, Miss Hogan has occasionally been called upon to teach someone who has lost or is losing both sight and hearing. Occasionally a girl appears whose personal qualifications give promise that she may hold her own as a stenographer side by side with sighted girls. In that case, Miss Hogan encourages a course in typing, and in Braille shorthand. Such training includes of course practice in the use of the dictaphone.

For the blind girls at the Richmond Center, the Richmond local chapter of the Virginia Association of Workers for the Blind finances an "outing" each summer. At Coles Point, on the Potomac River, a cottage is rented near the beach. There the blind girls, with a housekeeper, are taken to spend a month of the summer. Swimming and "picnicking" are daily recreations, and friends take the girls boating and fishing.

As supervisor of the home teaching department, Miss Hogan frankly states that the financial earnings of her pupils who work at weaving, sewing, basketry, chair caning, etc., are not likely to be large. Miss Hogan believes that "The great work of a home teacher is to relieve these lives from the monotony of idleness." She feels that the biggest need of her department at present is an increase of the home teaching staff so that personal instruction to the adult blind in their own homes by the visiting home teacher can be extended. Only a limited amount of that sort of real home teaching has thus far been feasible, owing to the smallness of the staff. Even so, there are some interesting stories of the help that home teaching has brought to certain lone individuals.

In Arlington, Virginia, Miss Hogan found a woman who had been employed in the Federal Bureau of Internal Revenue for nineteen years. Almost suddenly this woman had lost both sight and hearing. Miss Hogan

had no means of communicating with her except by tapping the woman's hands—three taps for "yes," two taps for "no." That was the method her family had used since the woman had lost her hearing. If she had known the manual alphabet used by deaf-mutes, communication would have been no problem. Miss Hogan has often taught deaf people, spelling to them on her hands. However, with no communication possible beyond the taps for "yes" and "no," she succeeded in teaching Braille to the deaf-blind ex-Federal secretary.

A Richmond woman, besides losing her sight, was ill and had to be taught at home if at all. Miss Hogan first got her a talking book machine, to the immeasurable delight of the lady. She then learned to weave cotton-chenille rugs. That was about two years ago. She has since busied herself weaving all the rugs her family can use. And this woman was 79 years old when she began to learn.

Home teaching in Virginia was initiated by the Commission in June, 1923, when Miss Anne Connelly of Pennsylvania came as the first home teacher for the blind employed in Virginia. Miss Connelly organized the work in Richmond, Norfolk, Lynchburg, and Roanoke. In 1926 she left Virginia to undertake similar work in another state. Miss Margaret Hogan, the present supervisor of home teaching, has been on the staff of the Commission since October, 1924. No work the Commission does is more vital, though much may be more spectacular, than in this department of home teaching, and it is earnestly hoped that an increase of the teaching staff may soon enable the department to cover more adequately its very diverse field—a field poor in its possibilities for statistical parade, but rich in its opportunities to throw light into dark cellars.

Placing the Blind at Gainful Work

From the founding of the Commission in 1922, Mr. L. L. Watts, its Executive Secretary, looked forward to such an expansion of his work as would justify the Commission in employing on its staff an expert who should devote his full time to the placement of blind men and women in self-sustaining jobs, preferably at work away from special institutions for the blind—jobs which, as far as possible, would put the blind worker side by side with other workers in business or industry. The Workshop for the Blind serves well the blinded laborer, but its capacity is limited, and, moreover, it is by no means adequate to the varied needs of all the blind, whose problems are as differentiated as personality is differentiated, except that they have this one thing in common—namely, that they can't see. For years the Executive Secretary himself undertook such placement work as was possible, and several of the men trained at Charlottesville were thus assigned to posts of gainful employment outside the workshop itself. But, until 1936, the limited State appropriation, the limited number of trained blind folk, and the sparsity of the fields for their placement, rendered impracticable the employment of a full-time placement agent.

In June, 1936, the "Randolph-Sheppard Act" went into effect. The Randolph-Sheppard Act is a Federal measure which provides for the free leasing of space in Federal buildings to blind people for the operation of news-stands. The act stipulates that State institutions or agencies for the blind shall be responsible for its administration in the several states, and

thus the Commission for the Blind became chargeable with its administration in Virginia.

The need for a placement agent became immediate. He must select suitable blind individuals to be entrusted with this new opportunity, and he must negotiate with postmasters for available space in their buildings, the Federal act having stipulated that permission to set up such a news-stand would be optional with the local postmaster or superintendent of the Federal building in which the free space might be sought. Moreover, the placement agent must see to the installation of equipment, and generally supervise the blind operators in this new undertaking.



NEWS STAND IN PUBLIC BUILDING

On November 1st, 1936, Mr. G. E. Wise of Ohio was added to the staff of the Commission as placement agent. Mr. Wise, who had previously served as field worker for the Ohio School for the Blind, went about his new work with vigor, and at this writing (December 1st, 1939) news-stands, operated by blind individuals, have been set up in all the post offices in Virginia in which it is thought they would prove a paying business—in Richmond, Norfolk, Petersburg, Alexandria, Warrenton, Portsmouth, Charlottesville, Roanoke, Arlington, Danville, Lynchburg. Besides placement of news-stand operators in these Federal buildings, Mr. Wise has arranged for three such concessions in non-Federal buildings—in the City Hall at Clifton Forge, in the Courthouse at Jonesville, Lee County, and in the lobby of the Engineering Building at the University of Virginia.

How do these blind operators work, what do they sell, and what do they earn?

They sell newspapers, periodicals, tobacco products, confections, razor blades, picture cards, and such other small articles as they can handle without assistance. No drinks or ice cream or anything likely to litter the lobby is sold. The blind operator of the stand does his work without assistance simply because there is nothing to be done that can't be done without eyesight. He handles nothing that has to be poured, or weighed, or measured. He has a place for everything and if it "stays put" he "knows which things are where." For instance, his periodicals are so stacked or placed that he can instantly put his fingers on the one you call for.

News-stands, except the very large ones, are not a highly paying business. The blind operator of these officially sponsored ones has no rent to pay. He is charged only two per cent of his receipts for depreciation of equipment, postage, etc. This two per cent is the only expense of the business he bears above the wholesale purchases he makes. With these inside concessions, the profits to the operator, while not impressive, are substantial, and, for a blind man without a family, the average-sized news-stand will yield a good living. All the news-stands thus far set up are run by blind men, except the one in the Richmond Post Office, which is being very successfully operated by Miss K., a young lady who attended the school for the blind in Staunton and more recently the Commission's training school at 3003 Parkwood Avenue, Richmond.

"Canteens".—Mr. Watts, as Executive Secretary of the Commission, had long pondered the possibilities of the automatic vending machine as a remunerative tool for "hands in the dark." As early as 1931 he had leased a number of these vending machines, and several blind men operated them with fair success on "candy routes" in Roanoke, Danville, Lynchburg, Richmond, and Norfolk. But, while these machines were easily operated by blind men, they did not vend the nationally known and popular brands of candy. They vended only the so-called "off brands" of candy manufactured by the firm which made this particular type of vending machine.

Early in 1938 Mr. Watts opened negotiations with the Automatic Canteen Company of America, with result that a representative from the company's home office in Chicago came to Richmond to study the feasibility of engaging blind men to operate his company's vending machines. Mr. Arden-son (we will call him that) knew nothing of the blind or their works, and the story of his reactions and final "conversion" is typical of the experience of many people in their first-time workaday contact with blind folk.

Mr. Arden-son as an average business man, was interested in the profit-and-loss aspect of the question. Could blind men really "service" these "canteens"?—that was what he wanted to know. By way of supplying first-hand information, Mr. Watts sent him to call at the apartment of Mr. H., a blind man who had successfully serviced vending machines in Roanoke and Danville and was now on a well-paying candy route in Richmond.

As they talked in the blind man's cozy apartment, the visiting Mr. Arden-son said frankly that he not only doubted that a blind man could operate the canteens, but, so far as he knew, a blind man "couldn't do anything." His host, who loves nothing so well as a sham-battle of words, said, "I'm blind, and I've kept a wife for over seven years, and a car for five years, and most of that time I've been in the candy business. If a blind man 'can't do anything', how do you think I survived?" Mr. Arden-son didn't know. Anyway, he would be clear on one point: he wanted his

host and all the other blind of Virginia to understand that he would not go into this deal on the basis of sympathy or any kindred tommyrot. The hard-boiled business man said, "If a blind man couldn't do the work, I'd tell him like I'd tell any other man—I'd tell him to go to hell." "Then," said his host, "in that case I, as a blind man and as a Virginian, would be glad to return the compliment." Mr. H., the genial host, was enjoying himself. He was doing very well with the vending machines he already had and was not over-anxious to take a chance with his visitor's high-rated product.



SERVICING A CANTEEN

It all ended with the visitor going out next day to see how his blind host worked the candy route. After he had seen the motions gone through for about three machines, Mr. Ardenson said he was tired; he had seen enough and could now go back and tell his company that he "Knew" that a blind man could service their candy canteens.

That was in the spring of 1938. Mr. Watts completed negotiations and soon the "canteens" began to be installed. These "canteens" are attractive, efficient, modern "automats." Each canteen will vend selectively: you can choose from five different brands or types of nationally known and popular five-cent candy bars. On one side of the candy canteen is attached a penny-slot machine for vending Wrigley's gum, and on the other side a penny-slot for vending handfuls of nuts. The blind man "services" these

machines, that is, he replenishes them with candy bars and gum as he takes out the nickels and pennies. These canteens are located in factories, banks, hotel lobbies, office buildings, service stations, or wherever the Commission can find and "negotiate" a good location. The blind worker is given a percentage of the intake, out of which he pays a helper who drives his car and fills out the report-cards. The workers must wear uniforms rented from the Canteen Company, a dark maroon uniform-suit with "Canteen" embroidered on the shoulder. Rules of "Servicing" prescribed by the Canteen Company and by the Commission are rigidly enforced. They are designed to keep the blind worker efficient by insisting that he accept no aid that he does not actually need. Also they are designed to accord the maximum courtesy to the proprietors who permit location of canteens on their premises as well as to the buying public.

This canteen work has grown rapidly since its inception in the summer of 1938. At present there are thirteen canteen routes being regularly covered by blind men. Each man has around seventy-five machines on his route. On average he services each machine twice a week. The Commission has leased to date about one thousand canteens for use of the blind workers. All routes are arranged, personnel selected, records kept, operations directed from the main offices of the Commission. Only in this way can so detailed a business be kept uniform and smooth-running. . .

In addition to the "canteens" and the news-stands set up in public

buildings, there is yet another line of salesmanship which Mr. Wise thinks may hold earning possibilities for the blind. The American Foundation for the Blind in New York is producing what are called "independence kits." A kit, handy and handsome for carrying, is stocked with small articles, such as cosmetics and shaving equipage, and, in the hands of an energetic blind canvasser, has brought neat returns where such salesmanship has been well tried out. Thus far eight persons have tried the "independence kit" in Virginia and with only moderate success. Others will doubtless make good use of it.

Thus far we have considered three groupings of the placement of blind workers—news-stands, candy routes, and carrying kits. Their field is essentially one line of endeavor—namely, selling things to the public. The business of the placement agent is broader than merely initiating blind people into one or another of these forms of salesmanship and supervising to some extent their progress. Actually, the placement agent is supposed to try to find a place in normal life for any blind person able and willing to earn his bread. He is supposed to seek out every possible job, which can be adapted to a pair of hands in the dark. That is the theory basic to placement work. This ideal theory has to run the gauntlet of personality-defects on the part of many of the blind themselves: sometimes no suitable man can be found to fit the job that is in sight. Sometimes it is the other way, as when a blind musician has to "waste his sweetness on the desert air because nobody will pay to hear him sing or play." Then, there is a certain amount of doubt on the part of people in business—doubt of the ability of blind workers to really do anything. This last, however, is the least of the placement agent's worries; at least it is so in Virginia where people will "meet a blind man more than half way" and the public is far more often kind than unkind. Perhaps this is true everywhere. But when the placement endeavor has run these three gauntlets of unfit blind personnel, fewness of adaptable jobs, and moderate skepticism from the public, that "*ideal theory*" of placement has lost most of its trimmings. Mostly, it comes down to this: the blind have to be put to work at handicrafts of proven adaptability like rug weaving or basketry, or they must be set up in small selling businesses of their own. As Mr. Wise has often remarked, "Mostly we have to put them where nobody can fire them—where nothing except their own poor efforts can defeat them."

Still, there are exceptions: the blind *Can* take places in normal commercial life. Take the case of Miss S., a blind stenographer.

She attended public school in her home community through the fifth grade. Trouble with the optic nerve quickly brought on blindness when she was about eleven years old. She entered the school for the blind at Staunton to complete her high school course. She then came to the Commission's training school in Richmond where she learned Braille shorthand and the use of the dictaphone. Showing unusual promise, she was encouraged to take an eight months' course at the Pan-American Business School where she studied typing, business English, and allied subjects. The placement agent had persuaded the employment manager at the offices of the Lawyers' Title Insurance Company to take on a blind stenographer, provided he could supply one fitted to do their work. Miss S. was ready.

That was eighteen months ago. Miss S. still goes every day from her boarding house to the Lawyers' Title Insurance Company. There she takes

dictation, (through the dictaphone); she writes form letters which go in streams from this particular office into the twenty-three states in which the Lawyers' Title Insurance Company does business from its home office in Richmond. Miss S. does a variety of office work besides addressing and stamping envelopes. In fact, here is a verbatim quotation from the employment manager of her office:

"We keep this young lady on our payroll," the manager says, "not because of any considerations of sympathy, but because she does well the work we want done. One of her close associates has told me that this young lady 'does as much work as anybody in the office'. That is true; no exaggeration."

The only count against Miss S. is that, being unable to "check over" her own typing, some one has to glance over it for detection of errors before it goes out in the mail, which is no count against her on dictated letters, since the "dictator" reads before he signs for most stenographers. She takes a cab to and from work on the few days when a neighbor working in the same office does not pick her up. Miss S., who does not love the limelight and wearies of being perpetually pointed to as an "example", is a young woman of poise and grace; takes pride in her work and feels a loyalty to her firm that is doubtless unexcelled in any other of the seventy-odd people who work in the same office.



The Commission seeks to practice what it preaches by employing as many blind as possible on its own staff. One of these so "placed" is Miss W. She too was a graduate of the school for the blind in Staunton. On

completion of her training under Miss Hogan, and an eight months' course at the Pan-American School of Business in Richmond, she was assigned to the telephone switchboard in the Commission's own offices. When you dial the Commission's 'phone, there is usually just one ring before you hear her cheery voice announce, "Virginia Commission for the Blind." When you tell her the "party" you want, she deftly manipulates the keys on her switchboard and instantly you have the connection you want—Executive Secretary, Ophthalmologist, Home Teacher, Canteen Department, Social Security Section, Sight Saving Division—she knows the keys and signals as well as the voices. In "placing" your call her nimble fingers have needed no assistance—not even from the "placement" agent.



Sight-Saving in the Public Schools

When the Virginia Commission for the Blind was set up in 1922, none of its fields of future usefulness was more ardently cherished by Mr. Watts than the conservation of children's eyesight. Sight-saving classes in the public schools had been first opened in this country in Brookline, Mass., in 1911, and in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1913. Medical records now show that one child in every 500 is attending school under the handicap of seriously defective vision. They are not "blind enough" to be sent to the State School for the Blind, neither are their eyes strong enough to stand the strain of normal uses in school without the risk of permanent injury and even ultimate blindness. Notwithstanding the urgency of this problem of which many parents and teachers were acutely aware, nothing was attempted toward its solution in Virginia until the advent of the Commission for the Blind. The Commission was started with a State appropriation of only \$10,000.00 a year, hence it was not until 1926 that the Executive Secretary could see his way clear to "do something" about these sight-problems in the schools.

In the fall of 1926 Miss Hazel Birkenmeyer, who came with high recommendation from her sight-saving work in the schools of Minneapolis, Minnesota, was added to the Commission's staff as Supervisor of sight-conservation classes in Virginia. In the session of 1926-27 she organized classes in the schools of Richmond, Norfolk and Roanoke. Just what is a "sight-saving class?"—what are its unique specifications?

A sight-saving class is a "home room" for the children with bad eyes—an "eye-conditioned" room equipped and supervised for the children's preparation of their regular classroom lessons. In the ideal, this "eye-conditioned" room has preferably northern exposure to eliminate the glare of sunlight. Its walls are finished in dull buff colors (nothing is in a glazed finish); its lighting is indirect; its desks are movable and adjustable, and it is provided with plenty of blackboard space. The pencils are of soft lead for big marking; the paper is cream-colored, unglazed, and with about a three-quarter-inch ruling. From the fourth grade upward, typewriting

is taught, the regular "touch system" being used. The text-books are in (24 point) big, bold, clear type. When these are not available, the sight-



A SIGHT-SAVING CLASS

saving teacher copies for the children on a "large type" writing machine. Occasionally some reading aloud must be done by the teacher. Manual training is added when it is thought practicable or essential to the child's development.

To be admitted a child must first have his eyes examined and be recommended for the sight-saving class by an ophthalmologist. To insure adequate individual attention, each class is limited to twelve children. As yet there is no compulsion. A child's inclusion in the class being optional with the parents.

The present supervisor, Mrs. Helen B. Jones, of Scottsville, Virginia, began her work with the Commission as teacher of a sight-saving class in Roanoke in 1928, and in September 1930 was selected as State supervisor. She has added a sight-saving class in Danville. Of the six such classes now functioning in Richmond, Norfolk, Roanoke, and Danville, four are in the elementary grades, one is in a junior high school, and one is in John Marshall High School, Richmond. The expense of these special classes is jointly borne by the Commission for the Blind and the local school administrations.

As yet the Commission has been unable to extend this needed service into the rural schools. However, the county eye-clinic which the Commission conducts through its ophthalmologist, Dr. Walter J. Rein, and a field nurse, Miss Mary E. Moore, are a long stride toward sight-conservation in the counties. Moreover, Mrs. Jones is in frequent demand for advisory conferences, and has thus been able to extend the services of her department far beyond the routine administration of the established urban classes.

The "contact-requirements" of this department are intimate and varied. Often parents or even teachers have to be persuaded that these classes are not designed for the mentally subnormal. Often it is necessary to make special arrangements for the transportation of children whose homes are not conveniently located to the building best adapted for the sight-saving class. Local Lions Clubs have been especially helpful in furnishing such needed transportation. The required contacts range from pioneering "con-fabs" with school superintendents to distressing revelations in slum-huts where a lean mother has been puzzled to know why "Tommie" or "Susie" wasn't "gittin' on no better" at school.

In order to give a proper conception of the objectives of this effort at sight-conservation, and the public's response to it, we cannot do better than to quote verbatim from Mrs. Helen B. Jones herself. In her annual report to the Commission, June, 1939, the Supervisor says in part:

"Seriously defective vision is one of the major handicaps in modern education. About twenty per cent of school children have some defect of vision—many of the defects so serious that a small group—approximately one child in 500, should not continue in the regular school without special educational tools: and there are a potential number of children who will within the year acquire some eye-difficulty through abnormal developmental change, disease, or injury. Recognizing the importance of vision and the obligation of offering every child equal educational opportunities, educators have established 589 sight-saving classes representing 200 cities, 27 states, the District of Columbia, and the territory of Hawaii.

"In the partially-sighted group, there are many who have normal vision with glasses, but whose condition is so serious that eye-work must be limited. Ideally, they must be taught to live with their lowered vision, to adjust to a school curriculum, to practice proper eye-hygiene and methods of conservation. The present emphasis is on school-adjustment, and it is essential that the teachers in these special classes have a sympathetic understanding of each child so that they can enrich his visual experiences and prepare him to take his place as a useful member of society. He must be led to make a real and permanent adjustment to life-situations in order that he may receive satisfaction, rather than develop a feeling of inferiority because of frustration.

"The gradual but steady growth in the number of sight-saving classes indicates that the general public is gradually becoming better acquainted with our aims and objectives. The benefits rendered and the results achieved have justified the public and private effort and expense involved, and confidence in the worthiness of the work is increasing. Experience has proved that sight-saving classes cannot be successfully maintained unless the public understands their function and believes in them. There must be co-operation of effort on the part of the school, the home, the medical profession, and society in general."

One pupil brought into a Richmond sight-saving class had previously failed for seven semesters to be promoted from the first grade. At the end of his first year in the sight-saving class he had been "double promoted." True, this was an exceptional case; but for all of the children the Commission's reports show a much higher "promotional" rating after the sight-saving class has come to their aid.

Eye Clinics and Prevention of Blindness



So far as is known, no eye clinics were free to school children throughout the State prior to 1928. In September, 1928, the Virginia Commission for the Blind inaugurated such a service with the addition to its staff of a field nurse. Limited appropriations precluded the employment of a staff ophthalmologist, and so the field nurse solicited the co-operation of eye-specialists who volunteered their services for the holding of free clinics in their respective sections of the State mostly on Sundays and holidays.

This more or less makeshift procedure rendered a high quality of service, but the number of children who could be thus aided was discouragingly small.

In 1935 Mr. Watts undertook to raise by public subscription (mainly in Richmond) sufficient funds to enable him to employ a full-time staff ophthalmologist. Heralded as the "John B. Tabb Memorial Eye Clinic Fund", the appeal met with a generous response and \$4,500.00 was raised. Dr. W. M. Steele was engaged as the Commission's first full-time ophthalmologist in the fall of 1935. Since that time the Legislature has made appropriation to sustain this important phase of the Commission's work. The total number of children whose eyes were examined by Dr. Steele up to June 30, 1936, was 3,852, and of these the total number given glasses was 1,875.

Dr. Steele, to the Commission's regret, terminated his connection with the State in July, 1937. For the interim that followed, valuable service was rendered by Dr. Edgar Childrey, Jr., of Richmond as part-time ophthalmologist for the Commission. Dr. Walter J. Rein is now full-time staff ophthalmologist for the Commission. In the part-year ending June 30, 1939, he conducted eye clinics for indigent school children in 38 counties of the State.



These eye-clinics are strictly co-operative with local authorities. Requests for such clinics come to the Commission from local health units or local school boards. Suppose a child, examined at one of these free clinics, is told to get glasses. Suppose his parents are too poor to get this prescription filled. The Commission, as a State institution, cannot dispense charity in the form of free glasses. In that case, what happens is this:

The names of those needing glasses are turned over to philanthropic groups or civic clubs who co-operate with the Commission by financing these needy cases which the Commission itself cannot finance. Notable among such organ-

izations are the Richmond Chapter of the Virginia Association of Workers for the Blind and the Lions Clubs throughout the State. In smaller communities the local church or parent-teacher groups are asked to assume the cost of needed glasses. No such solicitation is made except on positive evidence that the parents are unable to pay for glasses which the child imperatively needs.

We are speaking of only the "refracted" cases—those needing glasses. As for eye-treatment itself, none can be provided directly throughout the State, except the "non-surgical" treatment which the staff ophthalmologist may have opportunity to administer to needy cases. In the city of Richmond and vicinity, the Commission has enjoyed the aid from the Department of Ophthalmology and the free co-operation of the ocular staff of the Medical College of Virginia which provides needy patients with free operations, but not with free hospitalization.

These eye-clinics are on the increase in their usefulness in Virginia, as it is more and more realized that at least twenty per cent of children's eyes need corrective care.

Prevention of Blindness.—The average layman, whenever he stumbles into conversation about the fact of blindness, will voice the dream of some miracle of science which will one day, perhaps soon, eliminate blindness from the race by one easy stroke. He says, "Why not? Radio and television were thought impossible twenty-five years ago." He has come to expect "a bran-new miracle" from medical science every week. Many blind themselves may secretly indulge such a hope, and the more superstitious or credulous ones have been victimized by faith healers or even by pseudo-oculists whose assured place in inferno can never be so torrid as they deserve. Newspapers and reputable magazines have, on occasion, lent encouragement to this type of wishful thinking by publishing stories of marvelous ocular surgery.

Meantime, medical men have been quietly busy, tackling the actualities of the problem.

Toward the end of the last century, Crede, working at the University of Leipzig, developed a method of fore-stalling ophthalmia neonatorum. Ophthalmia neonatorum is the technical name for what is popularly known as "baby's sore eyes." The Crede method consists in dropping a weak solution of nitrate of silver into the eyes of the newborn. The method was so universally confirmed in obstetrical practice that, within the present century, many states have passed laws making its use compulsory. At the suggestion of Dr. Frank C. Hanger of Staunton, Hon. Herbert J. Taylor introduced the bill in 1918 which gave Virginia one of the best laws extant for the prevention of blindness from ophthalmia neonatorum. The Virginia Commission for the Blind, in co-operation with the Public Health Service, is charged with the enforcement of this law. Medical men are convinced that ophthalmia neonatorum is almost one hundred per cent preventable if the Crede method is scrupulously applied.

What causes ophthalmia neonatorum or "Baby's sore eyes"?

What percentage of it is caused by gonorrheal infection cannot be accurately stated. Various compilers have put this causation as low as 40 per cent and as high as 65 per cent of all cases of ophthalmia neonatorum. As for statistics on gonorrheal infection, one may appropriately recall the warning of Disraeli: "There are three kinds of lies," said he, "Lies, damned lies, and statistics."

We have been speaking only of ophthalmia neonatorum, and we have said that it is almost one hundred per cent preventable through the Crede treatment of the newborn. If ophthalmia neonatorum were the cause of *All* the infantile blindness, then *All* infantile blindness would be preventable. But ophthalmia neonatorum is not the cause of *All* infantile blindness. Here again, we have no trustworthy statistics, and shall have to be content with the general statement that "ophthalmia neonatorum is by far the most frequent cause of infantile blindness." Thus, the major fraction of infantile blindness is preventable.

We have spoken of gonorrheal infection of the newborn. Gonorrheal infection likewise attacks the eyes of adults. Physicians know how to treat such cases successfully, provided they are taken in time, which means *At Once* and before the eyes can be permanently damaged. But the treatments thus far developed are a somewhat long-drawn-out procedure. In the effort to simplify the treatment for gonococally infected eyes, Dr. Walter J. Rein, in collaboration with Dr. O. B. Tibbetts, recently investigated at the Medical College of Virginia the irrigation with sulfanilamide or gonorrheally-infected eyes. They published the results of their work in a technical article in "The American Journal of Ophthalmology" (October, 1939). For this investigation the preliminary work was done with dogs. It was learned that irrigation with sulfanilamide solution would produce no ill after-effects by trying it out on dogs' eyes. When it was deemed safe to apply this irrigation to human eyes and "system," Drs. Rein and Tibbetts took a series of fifteen patients of varied ages at the College Dispensary for treatment with sulfanilamide irrigations, and another series of fifteen to be treated by usual methods. They carefully tabulated the progress and the results of the two groups. They report that the fifteen patients whose eyes were irrigated with sulfanilamide solution showed no mal-

effects either as to eyes or "system." Moreover, the time of treatment for their fifteen patients given the solution was only 6.8 days, whereas the time needed for the usual treatment of the other fifteen was 27.2 days. Further research in this direction may possibly raise the percentage of preventable blindness in adults suffering from gonorrheal infection.

As for the eradication or prevention of blindness in toto, social agencies should be warned against making extravagant or misleading claims. The whole thing may be roughly compared to the problem of preventing automobile accidents. Some types of accident you *can* prevent: you can prevent collisions with railway trains by eliminating *all* grade crossings. Just so, you can prevent blindness from ophthalmia neonatorum by the Crede prophylaxis. Some accidents may be prevented by correction of faulty construction by the engineer who designs the car. Just so, Dr. Rein is recommending that legislative steps be taken to limit inter-familial marriages which, records show, are often a contributing cause of infantile blindness in Virginia. But our analogy is faulty at this point, for neither the doctor nor the State Legislature can be the "designing engineer" for *all* pre-natal causation of blindness. Doctors do not know *all* the causation of congenital blindness. Moreover, this larger fact is potent: you may control cars, but you can't re-make the people who drive them. Your traffic lights may mean nothing to the driver who is drunk. Just so, the cause of blindness in toto is a maze of complex causation—social, hereditary, personal. Often you can see a remedy in theory that won't work in practice. For instance, you might eliminate *all* head-on collisions of automobiles by having only one-way roads, but it would be utterly impractical to have only one-way roads the country over. Just so, you might eliminate all blindness from trachoma if you could change the living habits of whole communities, states, or races, but it is impossible to change overnight the living habits of whole communities, states, or races. And so the Mohammedan mother, taught to believe that it is a sin to destroy life in any form, refrains from brushing the flies from her baby's eyes, which is one reason why Egypt is one of the "blindest" countries in the world.

T r a c h o m a (sometimes spoken of as "granulated eyelids") is quite prevalent in the mountainous and southwest sections of Virginia. Dr. Rein's studies of case records so numerous from those sections of the State may prove valuable data looking to the ultimate control of this disease of the eye which has so long baffled the doctors. Indeed, it is in researches like this that one can envision a vast usefulness for this phase of the Commission's service. Its

department of ophthalmology, in conjunction with the laboratories of the State's medical schools, might conceivably do an epoch-making piece of work



A FAMILY WITH TRACHOMA

in altering the ratio of blindness to the general population, which is now at least one in every thousand.

At present the Commission's ophthalmologist is rather beset with routine duties. When the Federal Social Security Act went into effect, it became the Commission's duty to review the medical record of all individuals applying for "aid to the blind" under the Federal Act. Dr. Rein has reviewed 1,400 such cases in the past year.

For all our conservatism in stating the case for possible prevention of blindness, it remains true that very much can be accomplished by educating the public into a reception of the facts and practices already tested and proved. Without any doubt there are fewer blind in Virginia today than there would have been without the law requiring the Crede prophylaxis. Many people are needlessly blind for life: they would not have been so if drops had been used in their baby eyes. Many school children will not go blind because the Commission has afforded them a free eye-clinic, or has taken them into a sight-saving class. The more the public appreciates these facts, the more it will demand the extension and improvement of the service. No, we cannot abolish accidents, but we *can* reduce them. After all, traffic lights *do help*.

Aid to the Blind and Social Service

What can be done for the aged blind and others blind who are absolutely "unemployable"?

"Aid to the Blind" is one of the provisions of the Federal Social Security Act. This Federal Act was paralleled by an act of our State Legislature in 1938, and Social Security went into effect in Virginia July 1st, 1938. The Legislature designated the Virginia Commission for the Blind as the State agency for administering "Aid to the Blind."

Mrs. Rose Minter, the Commission's statistician on Aid to the Blind, reports that as of November 30th, 1939, 944 individuals are receiving direct aid. Of each dollar paid out, the Federal Government pays 50 cents, the State pays 31.25 cents, and the local unit 18.75 cents. At present the average grant for the whole State is \$12.63, the rate for city dwellers being slightly higher than for those on farms.

Application for Aid to the Blind is made at the local Welfare Office of which there are 123 units in the State. The local Welfare Supervisor investigates the economic status of the applicant and a district supervisor from the Commission for the Blind investigates his potentialities for rehabilitation. If he can possibly be re-oriented into self-sustaining endeavor, he is not put on Aid to the Blind. In all cases the Commission must pass on the applicant's visual status. Dr. Rein makes a "medical review" of every case before it is passed on by the local Welfare Board. Many cases he examines are amenable to treatment or surgery, especially cases of cataract, and such corrective treatment occasionally relieves an applicant from having to go on Aid to the Blind. Under the Federal Act, no one can claim this Aid to the Blind if he has more than "20/200 normal field vision in the better eye"—that is, he must be "blind enough" to see at only twenty feet what normal eyes see at two hundred feet. The Commission must not only review the medical record for every case, but, in case of an applicant's appeal from the finding of the local Welfare unit, the Commission is charged with hearing such appeal and making the award that is final.

Mrs. Minter's report for the ten months from September, 1938, when Aid to the Blind began to be dispensed in Virginia, to June 30, 1939, shows that of the total of 930 persons accepted for Aid to the Blind, 494 were white, 432 were negroes, and 4 were foreign-born. 72 per cent of these are 50 years and older. 41.4 per cent are 65 and over.

These are they who can be helped in no other way save through Aid to the Blind. A talking book machine, or instruction at some handicraft, may and often does help them to beguile the lonely hours, but as for learning a new trade or a new business, for them the "yoke of light denied" has been thrust too late upon their already drooping shoulders. Whatever one may think of governmental subsidies in general, it is certain that these aged blind engage every sentiment of human sympathy,—

"For hard things borne from birth
"Make iron of the soul and hurt the less.
"'Tis change that paineth, and the bitterness
"Of life's decay when joy hath ceased to be
"That makes dark all the earth."

Social Service.—In her statistical report on Aid to the Blind, Mrs. Minter observes that, since 72 per cent of those persons on Aid to the Blind are fifty years and over, the comparatively small percentage of those blind under 50 who are needing direct aid must be taken as an indication of the effectiveness of the Commission's program of rehabilitation. Further, she voices the opinion that the number on Aid to the Blind in Virginia will never exceed 1,200. If this forecast should prove anywhere near accurate, then it can be said that about one-third of the blind of Virginia, or at least one-third of those with serious visual handicap, are or will be provided for through direct aid.

The other two-thirds of the blind or visually handicapped are those who use or may use one or another of the Commission's special services. How are the blind "contacted"?—How does the Commission know *who* in the State *are blind* and *where they live* and *what they need*?

Upon its founding in 1922 the Commission's first act was to inaugurate a census of the blind. A field agent was employed who registered, through an ample questionnaire, all the blind that could be found and visited in certain designated cities and counties of the State. The immediate purpose of this census was to assemble data on which the Commission's plans for expansion and its claims to public support could be based. This census proceeded until some fifteen hundred blind living in all parts of the State had been listed. At that point, it seemed advisable that money which the census was costing should be spent in ways more directly beneficial to the blind, and so the census was discontinued. Meantime, two home teachers were added to the Commission's staff, and though the census was never resumed as anybody's full-time job, the list of blind was kept fairly well up-to-date incidentally to the functioning of the several types of work taken on, but, as for "going out into the highways and hedges and compelling them" to be blind, no such deliberate survey was sustained by the Commission between 1924 and 1938.

In 1938 the Federal Social Security law took effect in Virginia, and the Commission became responsible for administering Aid to the Blind. Though

actual operation of this Aid to the Blind did not get under way until September, 1938, the office of the Commission was ready with its forms and regulations for this new responsibility by July 1st when the law was supposed to go into effect. Moreover, the Commission had employed three "field supervisors," all of them experienced social service workers, for collaboration with the local Welfare boards in administering Aid to the Blind. But the business of these field supervisors is broader than the mere technique of administering Aid to the Blind. It is they who seek out the blind and the visually handicapped in every community—seek them out, study their needs, and refer them to that particular phase of the Commission's service which fits the particular individual. It is they who act as the "liaison" between the blind and the Commission. Through these field supervisors the Commission "contacts" the blind—knows *who* in the State *are* blind, *where* they live, and *what* they need.

Suppose the particular case to be that of a child who ought to be in school in Staunton, but who is being, by his parents through a mistaken idea of kindness, allowed to grow up in ignorance at home. It is the field worker's job to so "smooth-handle" the family as to land the child in the State school for the blind. In extreme circumstances, the compulsory education law can be invoked, but this is rarely resorted to. Suppose there is found a case of blindness or near-blindness which needs treatment or surgery. The field worker seeks local co-operation through the Welfare unit, and the case is brought to Dr. Rein or to some volunteer ophthalmologist nearer the patient's home.

Miss Anne Thompson, previously experienced as Welfare supervisor in Chesterfield, is the Commission's field worker for Southwest and Southside Virginia. Since her district comprises the communities where trachoma is prevalent, her survey of the blind has shown an especially large number of un-schooled blind children and other children with serious visual handicap. Miss Thompson is convinced that the Commission's most urgent need is for an additional ophthalmologist on its staff.

Miss Ina Steele, who comes to the Commission's staff from a long and varied experience with both private and public social service agencies in Missouri, is enthusiastic over the "personal service" aspects of her work as opposed to the emphasis on "direct relief." Miss Steele, as field worker in Northern Virginia, believes that more eye clinics are the greatest present need of her mostly rural territory.

Mrs. Minetree Folkes of Richmond is the directing supervisor of the Commission's field work. She comes to the staff from a rich background of experience, having done field work for the Children's Home Society and the Richmond Children's Bureau as well as other social agencies, Federal, State and private. As field supervisor in Eastern Virginia where the colored population is largest, Mrs. Folkes is impressed with the need of increased facilities for rehabilitating blind negroes, a long-felt need which the Commission is earnestly considering. Moreover, Mrs. Folkes' district comprises the largest urban centers in Virginia, and it is in these urban centers that home teaching of the blind is economically practicable. Mrs. Folkes is a strong advocate of home teaching as a means of re-orienting the adult blind as she finds them in her district.

Through these field supervisors the administration of Aid to the Blind can be kept closely co-ordinated with the Commission's other services for

the blind or the visually handicapped. For example, many applicants for Aid to the Blind are found to have a correctable handicap of vision, and when Dr. Rein reviews these cases, it is often true that treatment, surgical or otherwise, has not only helped the visually handicapped individual, but helped the budget of Aid to the Blind. Typical of such cases are the two young women from the Eastern Shore who had been on Aid to the Blind, but were removed from this category after their cataracts were removed in a Richmond hospital. Dr. Rein has done a tremendous amount of work on eyes in connection with his official reviewing of the visual potentialities among these applicants for Aid to the Blind. Now and then the progress of glaucoma is arrested, but of the successfully treated cases the majority are those with cataract.

Aid to the Blind, thus co-ordinated with the "self-help" services of the Commission, becomes in practice what in theory it was meant to be—namely, a last-resort means of helping those blind who cannot possibly be led into any form of self-help. This well-unified program, centrally directed by the Virginia Commission for the Blind, is free from overmuch redtape. Comparatively speaking, its set-up is simple:

The field worker finds a blind individual. If she is wise, she perceives his specific need and how the Commission may meet it. If he is willing, he accepts the advice. If the staff personnel is what it ought to be, the applied remedy is likely to work, and thus is done the maximum of good to the blind, which is just what the Commission was created to do.

Historical Sketch

Work for the blind dawned in Virginia in 1839. At that time America's foremost educator of the blind was Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe, of Boston, whose wife, Mrs. Julia Ward Howe, was to write "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" and whose daughter, Mrs. Laura Howe Richards grew up to become the author of "Captain January." Dr. Howe was the pedagogical grandsire of Helen Keller, for it was he who sent Anne Sullivan (Mrs. Macy) to Alabama to become the tutor of Helen Keller and to lead this deaf-blind child out of her spiritual prison-cell into international spot-lights. More than forty years before Helen was born, Dr. Howe had "grandsired" the Virginia School for the Blind in Staunton.* He had brought pupils of his Massachusetts School for the Blind to demonstrate before the Virginia Legislature, and the legislative fathers were moved to set up a school for Virginia's blind children. Previously the first school for the deaf in America had been conducted in the home of Colonel William Bolling at "Cobbs Place" near Petersburg. Friends of the deaf said, "If you are going to establish a State school for the blind, why not take in the deaf too?—make it a dual school." Prominent among citizens who gave their voice for the new venture was the eloquent and influential Dr. William S. Plumer, then pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Richmond. The school was opened at Staunton in 1839,—and Virginia had taken this humane, forward-step twenty years before John Brown's body lay a-moldering in the grave.

The history of that school is not to be here reviewed in detail. Throughout the years it has been a genuinely useful institution, the measure of its

* "The Blind" by Harry Best (Macmillan Company 1919) page 268 and foot note on page 266.

usefulness varying from time to time with changes in the personnel of its superintendent, faculty, and pupils. Living alumni, deaf or blind, will recall with abiding gratitude their years under that watchful guardian of their growth, Mr. Wm. A. Bowles, who began to reign in 1896 following a stormy investigation ordered by the Governor. Mr. Bowles' term as superintendent probably brought the greatest internal improvement and the largest building expansion in the history of the school.

But why place the deaf and the blind together in the same school? It was not done for reasons intrinsic to the education of either. The original reasons for this duality were external, like "The numbers are small," or "Spare the treasurer," or "The thing is but an experiment." As of 1839 they must have seemed good reasons. Nowadays most states have separate schools for the deaf and for the blind. Virginia has espoused that ideal to the extent of acquiring land near the University on which to erect a separate school for the blind. This was done in 1924. No appropriations for building have since been forthcoming. Meantime, despite building expansion at the Staunton school, it is being more and more over-crowded. Surveys by field workers from the school and more recently from the Commission indicate (so we are told by those who are supposed to know) that new buildings somewhere will soon be absolutely necessary if deaf or blind children are not to be turned away. Friends of both the deaf and the blind are urging the separation of the schools as being in the better interest of both groups.

Due largely to the energies of Mr. W. C. Ritter, a deaf alumnus of the Staunton school, a similar school located near Newport News was opened in 1908 for deaf and blind negroes. It is said to be the largest school of its kind in the world.

Aside from these two schools for children, there was no work for the blind whatsoever in Virginia until the coming on the scene in 1919 of a man destined to alter the whole course of work for the blind in Virginia and indeed to win recognition as a leader in this work throughout the United States and Canada.

The Beginning of Organized Work.—The story of organized work for the blind from its founding in 1919 is one of the romantic chapters in the history of social service in Virginia. It is a tale which hangs by an accident that occurred in Dickenson County on May the 27th, 1913. A rocky hillside was being excavated by a railroad construction crew; dynamite was the order of the moment. Part of a blast had not gone off, and, when the smoke had cleared, Lucian Louis Watts, construction superintendent, went to see what was the matter. He was standing almost over the spot when ten sticks of dynamite suddenly went off. When he was picked out of the debris and some of the gravel was picked out of his face, he was taken to where meager first-aid was available. They didn't think he would live, but, after some weeks of medical care, it became evident that there had been not only no internal injuries, but that there would probably remain no disfiguring facial scars. When they told him he would remain blind, he would not believe it then nor for months afterward. But they were right. The blast had cost him both his eyes.

When a man under twenty-five loses his sight, what does he do—what can he do? First, he must learn how to be blind—how to substitute hands and ears for eyes. In 1913 there was no expert agency in Virginia for

Watts to turn to, unless he went to the school at Staunton for blind children. Any one past school age must get into that school by special arrangement, even paying monthly rates.

Watts went to Staunton in the fall of 1914. He learned the Point system, a sort of Braille then being taught. He learned the blind man's trades, such as broom making, mattress making, chair caning. He even dabbled a little into music and piano-tuning, much to the amusement of those keen-eared blind boys. But he was learning to go over town unguided, and to laugh at the blunders of blind folk (his own included), and the sum total of all this was a more or less complete re-education of the senses. For three years he picked up such odds and ends as the school could supply to this re-education of a blinded adult, and then took a position in the school as boys' supervisor and teacher of the practical trades.

Meantime, a large purpose was beginning to take shape in Watts' mind. As visitors dropped in from other schools for the blind, and as he read of what was being done for the blind in other states, he began to ask himself why some of these things shouldn't be done in Virginia. The blind alumni of his school were not even organized. He must get something started. Then there was Mr. Taylor: he was teacher of the men's class Mr. Watts attended at Sunday School. He was in the Legislature and had already introduced the bill to require doctors to use drops in all babies' eyes to prevent ophthalmia neonatorum. Mr. Taylor could be counted on to help with any legislative program for the good of the blind. But there must be some organization formed. Legislatures won't listen to an individual, and there was much more that an organization might do besides lobbying for the blind.

That is how it came about that a call went out from Staunton summoning all the alumni and the friends of the blind to meet in June and form the Virginia Association of Workers for the Blind. Commenting on Mr. Watts' zeal in launching this embryonic movement, one alumnus says:

"I did not attend that meeting, but it was not Watty's fault that I didn't. He not only sent me an invitation, but sent me his personal check to pay my fare. I don't know why he thought it so important that I should be there. Anyway, I couldn't go and had to return this check; but no discouragements, small or otherwise, kept him from starting the Association like he said he would."

From the founding of the Association in June 1919 to the present date, the history of work for the blind in Virginia is largely the story of Mr. Watts and his expanding activities through the Association and through the Virginia Commission for the Blind. Only its "high spots" will be touched in this sketch.

In 1920, Mr. Herbert J. Taylor of Staunton, got through the Legislature a bill authorizing an investigation of conditions of the blind in Virginia. The investigating commission named were Mr. Taylor, Mr. Watts, and the late Senator S. L. Ferguson of Appomattox. They made a survey of the blind in certain representative cities and counties, and on the data thus gathered they recommended the establishment of a permanent Virginia Commission for the Blind. They also recommended selection of a site for a new school for the blind children. Both these bills were passed and became law in 1922. Mr. Taylor was made chairman of the new Commission, as well as chairman of the committee to select a site for the new school. This

committee selected a site near the University of Virginia which was purchased by the State in 1924. Mr. Taylor has continued to serve as chairman of the Commission from its establishment to the present date and, though he has long since withdrawn from the House of Delegates, it is certain that the blind of Virginia never had a better friend in the Legislature, nor a more unselfish devotee of their cause among private citizens, than Mr. Herbert J. Taylor of Staunton.

With the founding of the Virginia Commission for the Blind in 1922, Mr. Watts was promptly chosen as its Executive Secretary. Opened first in Charlottesville, his office was later removed to Richmond and is now located at 3003 Parkwood Avenue. From his native Albemarle County, citizens elected Mr. Watts to the House of Delegates in 1925, and he represented his home district for four consecutive terms. While lending his legislative support to all measures pertaining to the blind and sponsoring a bill making applicable to blind children the State compulsory education laws, Mr. Watts as a member of the Legislature was known for the breadth and constructiveness of his legislative espousals. To the regret of his constituents he did not stand for re-election after 1931.

In 1933 the Commission was host to the biennial convention of the American Association of Workers for the Blind. At this convention, meeting in Richmond, Mr. Watts was elected first vice-president of that international organization. On the death of its president in 1934, he took over the duties of chief executive, and was himself elected president at the next biennial convention meeting in Louisville in 1935. The American Association of Workers for the Blind is an organization representing all types of work for the blind and all organizations for the blind throughout the United States and Canada. Since his retirement in 1937 from its presidency, Mr. Watts has been a member of the Board of Directors of this organization, and chairman of its legislative committee.

What the Commission has done and is doing—its census of some fifteen hundred blind during 1923 and '24; the launching of home teaching in 1923; the opening of the Workshop at Charlottesville in 1925; the initiation of sight-saving classes in public schools in 1926; the addition of a field nurse in 1928 and of an ophthalmologist in 1935 for holding eye-clinics and doing other preventional work; the initiation of news-stand placements in 1936 and of candy routes in 1938; the inauguration of Aid to the Blind in 1938,—all these activities have received detailed treatment elsewhere in this pamphlet, and they represent a growth and a quality of service to the blind that is perhaps unparalleled in any other of the forty-eight states. . . .

The Virginia Association of Workers for the Blind, Inc., has continued to take an active role closely co-ordinated with the work of the Commission. For example, when Mr. Watts wanted to open a workshop for blinded laborers, and the Commission had no State funds for this purpose, the Association raised the funds through private subscriptions. Mr. F. A. Wrench, the Association's field representative, has become well-known in the State. The workshop was opened in 1925, owned by the Association, but operated by the State Commission for the Blind. When it became a going concern, the State took it over. This "purchase" was actually one-third a purchase and two-thirds a gift from the Association to the State, since the State, by assuming the Workshop's bonded indebtedness of some \$34,000, acquired property which had cost the Virginia Association of Workers for the Blind over

\$100,000 for land, building, and equipment—all raised by private subscription. Similarly, when funds were needed to pay a full-time ophthalmologist and the Commission had none, Mr. Watts, largely through the Richmond Chapter of the Association and through the John B. Tabb Memorial Association, raised funds to employ the Commission's first ophthalmologist in 1935. When this new service had been set up and its usefulness duly noted, the State made appropriation to sustain it. This, be it noted, is one of the soundest principles in any and all forms of social service: to try out a new activity on a small scale—try it out under private auspices and private economy, and then when it has been found to work, ask the State to take over the tested program and enlarge it as needs require. One may be forgiven the passing observation that it is a great pity some of the Federal efforts toward the "abundant life" could not have been made on this principle instead of by the more costly route of wholesale "trial and error."

Mr. Watts did not of course invent that principle; it has long been practiced by healthy social agencies in America. Indeed we have tried to avoid heaping fulsome personal praise on Mr. Watts. He did not invent sight-saving classes, or workshops, or home teaching, or eye-clinics, or Aid to the Blind, or any other of the major benefactions of organized work for the blind. What he *did do* was to pioneer for these things in Virginia, and he did this at a time when apparently nobody else in the various State departments had even remotely considered the possibility of such undertakings.

Now that these various activities of the Commission have begun to function well on a State-wide scale and have come in for much friendly recognition from the public, it is to be expected that other and larger State departments will seek to take over and absorb one or another of these activities for the blind. The case is somewhat like that of the farmer who ventures to risk something on a new crop untried before in his community. His neighbors look askance at him and prophesy his early bankruptcy. Then, when his new venture shows a profit, they all pitch in next year and plant so much of the new crop that the market is glutted. The program of the Virginia Commission for the Blind will never be a very big program, for the numbers are small—blindness is rather on the decrease than on the increase, thanks to the wisdom of the Legislature in compelling the use of drops in babies' eyes. But this program is a well-unified one, all its phases proportionately co-ordinated and directed to a single end—the betterment of the blind of Virginia. Now that this program has been well established it is hoped by friends of the blind that nothing will be allowed to happen that would seriously disrupt it. A *unified* work for the blind is the *best* work for the blind, from the finding of a blind child in the mountains and sending him to school, to the placing of a talking book in the home of the aged infirm.

For fifteen years the Commission's quarters in Richmond, for both offices and workrooms, were privately donated and did not cost the State a penny either for rent or purchase.

Talking Books and Braille

A talking book is a book orally rendered through phonographic recordings so as to be read by ears instead of eyes. It is the newest thing in practical equipment for blind people's reading.

The public generally is familiar with Braille, devised about a hundred years ago in France by Louis Braille. In use during part of the nineteenth



LISTENING TO A TALKING BOOK

century were books printed in "line type"—Roman print enlarged and raised for finger reading. "Raised letters" could not be written by the individual, nor are they as tangible for swift reading as are Braille characters which are made by perforating the paper so as to form dots. Each Braille character is not differentiated by the number of dots, but by the relative position of one or more dots out of the possible six-dot combination. These six basic dot spaces are two dots wide and three dots deep.

Braille Alphabet

a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j
k	l	m	n	o	p	q	r	s	t
u	v	w	x	y	z				
,	;	:	.	!	()	"?		

Other punctographic or dot systems were devised in the United States, as the New York Point and the American Braille. Among workers for the blind there was a lively war between adherents of these various dot systems in America, until about 1920 when all systems (except the Moon) gave way to European Braille which is now the worldwide system for finger reading. Of very limited use, the Moontype is a system especially devised for the senile touch, letters being symbolized by big simple geometrical figures. Braille can be written by hand as the old raised Roman print could not be. Braille books are printed at several plants throughout the country, but chiefly at the American Printing House for the Blind, Louisville, Kentucky. This plant has been subsidized by the Federal Government since 1879.

Books for the blind from lending libraries go through the mail free of postage. The world-war gave quite an impetus to the production of Braille due largely to public interest in the blinded soldiers. Red Cross chapters transcribed thousands of volumes into Braille by hand, and recent Government grants have so increased the output of printing houses that nowadays Braille titles available to the blind through libraries are impressively numerous and varied. For instance, "Gone With the Wind" appeared in Braille (in twelve volumes) shortly after its publication. Helen Keller took with her a Braille copy of "Gone With the Wind" on her voyage to Japan. We repeat the word "Libraries," because not many blind persons can own many Braille books; they cost too much. We are told that it cost \$12,000.00 to put "Gone With the Wind" into Braille, of which edition not more than a few hundred copies (principally for schools and libraries) would be in demand. Many magazines appear in Braille, most of them especially compiled. Notable among the few publications which are re-produced in Braille exactly as they appear in print are "The Reader's Digest" and (beginning in January 1940), "*Time*," the weekly news magazine. In England there is a Braille edition of "*Punch*," condensed and giving narrative description of the cartoons. What about the speed of reading Braille? The fastest possible finger reading is about as fast as the eye and the voice can read aloud comfortably to the listening ear. Most Braille reading is not nearly so fast.

And since Braille reading is so slow, particularly for people blinded in maturity, the talking book is *their* great boon. The secret of the talking book is the long-playing record: each record plays fifteen minutes to each side of the disc. The following will give an idea of the "dimensions" of a talking book: "Magnificent Obsession," 14 records; Dickens' "Christmas Carol," 6 records; "Treasure Island," 10 records; "Hamlet," (with full cast), 7 records; "The Book of Psalms," 9 records. Mailed in cartons of about twenty records, such talking books are borrowed from the same regional libraries throughout the country which lend Braille books. Two such libraries serve the blind of Virginia,—the Library of Congress, and the National Library for the Blind, Washington, D. C. Talking books travel free of postage like other printed matter for the blind.

Phonographic machines for playing these records, either electrical or spring motored, are manufactured by WPA and "leased" to blind individuals at no cost and with little redtape. Individuals of course may purchase their own machines if they prefer. The making of the books is done at the recording studios of the American Foundation for the Blind in New York, and at the recording studios of the American Printing House for the Blind in Louisville, Kentucky. Private corporations, like the RCA-Victor Company, have generously granted the free use of their patents in the development and perfecting of the talking book.

Since talking book machines are a product of WPA, their distribution in the several states is assigned, through the Library of Congress to State agencies for the blind. The Commission is responsible for this distribution in Virginia. Miss Eleanor M. Ingram, Junior Executive in Mr. Watts' office, reports that, since the Commission became responsible for their distribution in March, 1936, 299 talking book machines have been allocated to Virginia blind.

It is probable that the talking book, more than any other special device brought out in recent years, will serve greatly to enrich the life of the individual blind—regardless of his earning power, health, age, race, or previous aversion to solitude. But it is a terribly lazy form of reading, which may account for part of its popularity.

The Blind Individual

There are blind individuals who have discovered for themselves "the Effective Life," and have done so without the aid of any Commission, or Association of Workers, or any other organization. There are a few of these in many walks of life—lawyers, ministers, journalists, wholesale dealers, salesmen, meat testers, (blind men have good noses for this), manufacturers, city coroners, trial justices, radio performers, piano tuners, orchestra leaders, musicians, composers, writers of advertising copy, osteopaths, switchboard operators, merchants. Virginia has her fair quota of these individuals who, in their several vocations, are leading an effective life and asking no odds of anybody. The Virginia Commission for the Blind should be the first to take off its hat to these, and only wish there were more of them.

It is but natural that people should ask questions about how a blind man gets along in this world. It is a world built, not for blind men, but for

men with five senses. People naturally want to know, "What is your conception of color?," "How do you get about by yourself?," "How does it seem to you when it is dark?," "Is it worse to be born blind or to lose your sight up in years?"

These questions, the most natural in the world, are at once the simplest and at the same time the most profound that could be asked of a blind man. When they are asked they seldom bring out the truth, and for two reasons: first, the questioner is usually too abrupt and tactless with his question; and, second, the blind man is usually too sensitive and bellicose with his answer. Now, the truth may hurt, but a part-truth or a distortion of truth, hurts even worse. If the truth were freely uncorked—if people knew how a blind man, deposited in their world of five senses manages to get along with only four—the mutual understanding that followed would put both at their ease in true social harmony. And the questions, though simple, are vital; the answers, though unique, are understandable.

In this much limited discussion, we had better concentrate on the blind man's way of *perceiving* things, and have little to say about his way of doing things. Also, we had better not expect anything like a rigid, exhaustive analysis. Instead, we shall take one or two leading questions, and let the answers radiate at loose tether from these.

"What is your conception of color?"

The man blind from infancy, who has no memory of vision, knows nothing of color. He knows the shape of things, the size of things, the weight of things, because these perceptions come by touch. But he knows nothing of color. He knows which door is the drug-store, which flower is the rose, which cigar is cheapest, which field is being fertilized, which fruit is over-ripe, which meat has spoiled, which egg is not good, where the fish market is, and here is the gas tank, and there was the hay field, and these are pine woods and what perfume the lady uses, (or did she forget it)—these things he knows from smell. But he knows nothing of color. He knows how Deanna Durbin has progressed; why the old maid was kicked out of the choir; can analyze Roosevelt's radio personality; may tell you the pitch of a tree-frog's chirp; can tell by your voice who you are, or what section you are from, whether you are educated or "just went there"—these things he knows through sound. He knows the sun exists, because he feels the heat of it. He knows the earth exists, because he walks on it; but he does not know of the stars, for he can not touch them, nor of the moon because it gives off no heat. If he were making his own private dictionary, its definitions of four very important words would run something like this:

"Sight. Noun. An unknown and unknowable sense through which some people claim to be cognizant of objects which they neither touch, taste, smell, nor hear.

"Light. Noun. The medium in space by which sight perceptions are received, and of which nothing may be known save through the odor, sound, or chiefly the heat which sometimes appertains to it.

"Darkness. Noun. A purely relative term; the absence of light; an unknown sensation, but one said to be fraught with extreme inconvenience to those dependent upon the myth of light.

"Color. Noun. A sensation stimulated only through the sense of sight. Hence color is unknown and unknowable."

Pierre Villey, in appropriate connection, says "Sight is a long distance touch with the sensation of color added." Had he been speaking in another connection treating of smell instead of touch—had he been describing, for instance a blind man's perceptions at a flower show, he might have said, "Sight is a long distance smell plus touch (or even plus sound) with the sensation of color added." We have stated the cold fact that the blind man without memory of vision knows nothing of color. We shall not dwell on what he thereby misses; let us see if there is anything he can retrieve therefrom.

All people unconsciously practice the transference of the "imagery" of one sense to the field of another. You know how onion tastes, and you know how apple tastes. Now get a small slice of onion and a small slice of apple; hold your nostrils tight with one hand, and with the other place one of these slices on your tongue, and see how hard it is to tell by taste which is onion and which is apple. The point is this: the distinctive sensation from the onion (or apple) is not altogether in its taste; indeed mostly it is in the smell. But taste and smell are so closely allied that it was not natural to make any distinction between them and so, unconsciously, you had been borrowing your "smell imagery" of the onion and transferring it to unite with your "taste imagery" of the onion. Unconsciously we are daily thinking of a "taste" of one thing or another, when it is not a taste—it is an odor transferred to and blended with our "taste imagery." This transference of imagery is easy to point out in the case of taste and smell because they are so closely allied. But the same kind of transference goes on when the two senses involved are not so closely allied, as for instance, sight and touch. You think you learn all things through sight, but do you? If I show you a new kind of razor, are you satisfied merely to look at it still held in my hands? You are not; you take that razor into your own hands, and only then do you get your desired impression of just what it is. Afterwards, you remember the razor as a thing you have "seen," not as a thing you have touched. You have, in memory, transferred all the impression of that razor to "sight imagery"; but it was not all sight imagery in the first place, it was partly an impression to be got by touch, or else you wouldn't have grabbed it out of my hands.

Now it is precisely through this transference of imagery—this borrowing of perceptions from one sense and consciously or unconsciously lending them to another—that the blind man's world is built up. You had thought that the difference between the onion and the apple was a difference in "taste imagery," until you discovered it was a difference mostly in "smell imagery." You think that the blind man has no "image" of your personality; he has never seen your face. You do not realize what he instinctively uses and what Disraeli expressed when he said, "There is no index of character so sure as the voice." Unconsciously you've formed the habit of thinking it is a friend's *face* you like; but is it entirely so? No, for unconsciously you are transferring memories of other impressions of that person and concentrating them all into this present visual image. That warm hand has touched you; that voice has soothed you. Now those memory-images are secretly flooding your present visual image—and now you like that face better than you once did.

The blind man makes these same transfers, only more of them. With him, the transfers are not unconscious only; they are built up by necessity, by effort, or by imagination. Indeed the heart of the matter is pretty close to this: that the blind man lives by these "substitutions." Some of them are instinctive, and he cannot remember when he learned them. For instance, going around by himself—how does he do it? He does it mostly by sound. When you see him cross a quiet street in the middle of a block, you wonder why he doesn't walk smack into one of those cars parked on the other side. He veers to the right or left, finds an opening, and mounts the curb. How does he do it? His ears are keen to catch echoes. The sound of his feet on the pavement, or the popping of his fingers for the purpose—these sounds are reflected back to him from the parked cars and so he knows they are there. This detection of echoes can be practiced to a fine point, sufficiently fine to enable him to locate a curb six inches high. So he need not hit a post, a building, a tree, a car;—anything that has a sound-reflecting surface he can dodge. A rose-bush has no such hard surface, and so there he gets stuck. A proclivity is not thus detectable, and so an open coal cellar he dreads. He knows full well the appropriateness of the Biblical language in picturing the "ditch" as the direst catastrophe likely to befall the "blind leading the blind." This keenness in detecting echoes does not mean that his sense of hearing is better than yours. You might locate a cricket in the cellar sooner than he will, or hear thunder in the distance before he does. But this particular use of his hearing—for detection of echoes—this he has been compelled to develop by use from infancy, and so he can find echoes where you would as soon expect to find elephants. Getting around without sight, though partly helped by the feel of the walk or the smell of the hedge, is mostly a matter of sound—its reflection, refraction, or interference. Details can not be gone into, but most questions of "locomotion visionless" can be explained in this general direction. For instance, deep snow not only "blurs" the pathway, but covers many objects to the extent that their echo-giving help is lost, and so a blind man doesn't go so well in the snow. Obviously useful is a cane or a guiding dog. Such "external" aids are not here considered. Why is it that no blind person (or few) will answer questions like, "How do you get about?"

As Pierre Villey says, "The blind man feels an invincible dislike to talking to others about his infirmity." The blind man's pet aversion is to hear you so much as hint that there is anything abnormal about him. He will do anything to keep you from thinking him abnormal. If he goes to college and finds that "regular fellows" drink, he may pitch in and become the biggest sot on the campus—just so there won't be any doubt that he's a normal "regular fellow." If he is old, his sensitiveness on this point may assume expression in an extreme irritableness. Nevertheless he secretly enjoys the role and repute of the "mysteriously remarkable person" and so when you ask him how he gets about by himself, he is likely to say "I go by air currents." This is not an explanation; it is a means of keeping you mystified. If you say the word "wonderful" to him, he'll sting you like a wasp. All the same, he'd like you to think him so. Though he wants you to think him perfectly "normal" he secretly hopes you think him "wonderful." He is human, he wants the world with a gold fence; he wants to eat his cake and have it. The next time you meet one, try this: don't talk about him or his blindness; talk about other things. He begins to be surprised; then he gets disappointed. Just wait long enough, and, like all men, he'll get on the topic all men like the best—namely, his own cleverness. This out-

ward determination to be known as "normal" coupled with a secret wish to be thought unusual—this is one of those magnificent inconsistencies close to the heart of reality. It shows just how *human* the blind man really is.

We have yet to speak of the part that imagination plays in building up the blind man's world of sensory substitutes. You must not expect the blind man to be very accurate or concrete in telling us how his imagination works. With regard to color, for instance, it is especially unreasonable for us to expect him to say what he *imagines* about color, when fact is you can't tell him in words just what color *is*. Robert Louis Stevenson tried that once. He wanted to order from London the interior trimmings for his home in the South Sea Islands and, master of English though he was, he could not put into written words his choice of color-scheme.

Starting with a bald fact, then, let us admit that the blind man misses what every mule can see—namely, the sunset. What is it that the mule, with good physical eyes, does not have?

It is the intellectual and emotional capacity for blending remembered sensation with new perceptions. It is the association of the qualities in things, in people, in ideas. Learning from infancy that grass is green, that snow is white, that the infinitude is blue, that gray is associated with age, or red with fire, or black with death or with dirt, the blind man builds up an association of the color name with the qualities in things that have that color. If he is musical, he will associate the light shades with major chords, and the dark shades with minor chords, and the neutral colors with single tones struck without harmonization. The harmonies will not mean the same as color shades, but, if by association he can make them sisters in the soul, then the moods which a minor chord evokes in him may possibly be the same moods that a dark shade evokes in you. Personal qualities may enter into the blend. He thinks of the personalities of people he knows. Light shades, and major chords—they seem to go with the bold, dashing blonde. Dark shades and harmonies in minor—they seem to go with the dreamy, elusive introverted brunette. The analogy is not perfect, for you may have a panoramic effect from beautifully alternating light and dark shades, and the panoramic thrill is instantaneous, whereas, if you struck major and minor chords simultaneously, the effect would be bedlam. Sight is quick, comprehensive. Touch and hearing are slow. The thrill of the panorama must be got from music, not instantly as from colors, but lingeringly, by successional modulation from major to minor. But if the emotional trophies are the same, it may be that "the race is not to the swift"—not altogether. Some have said that the full sublimity of Niagara breaks upon the spectator, not while he is looking at it, but afterwards when he thinks on what he has seen. Thus the blind man builds his inner world. If the unsuspected echoes tell him where the tree is, then music may convey *to* him what color withholds *from* him—a true sense of proportion, of the fitness of things, and the joy of the unquenchable thirst. If he has to say that the unseen moon must still be there, even though she gives out no warmth, then he will go further and affirm that the unseen Heart of the universe, though He gives out no word, must still be there.

A study of the psychology of blindness is not within the scope of this booklet. Readers who wish to pursue the subject, cannot do better than to read "The World of the Blind" by Pierre Villey (English translation by

Alys Hallard, published by the Macmillan Company, New York, 1930). For this work, M. Villey, himself blind and Professor of Literature at Caen University, received an award from the French Academy of Moral Science. "The World of the Blind" is a fascinating volume, and it is doubtful if a more thorough presentation of the psychology of blindness is obtainable than this work of M. Villey's.

One other question should be answered: "Is it worse to be blind from infancy or to lose one's sight in maturity?"

On this point, a field agent for a State Commission for the Blind, and one who has come into personal contact with some eighteen hundred blind people, has this to say:

"In my observation," he writes, "Those blind who best succeed in life are neither the infantile cases nor those blinded at any considerable age. Those who best succeed in life are generally the ones who lost their sight when they were old enough to have acquired first-hand information through their eyes, for we must remember that the eye is the most important instructor of childhood. They were old enough to have gotten this normal instruction through the eye, and yet young enough to make their adjustment to blindness. I should say, then, that if one *had* to lose his sight, the best time for this to happen would be between the ages of ten and twenty-five. Of course there are exceptions and notable ones, but, as a rule, you will find the best-adjusted and most successful were blinded within those age limits."

The blind individual is, after all, a human personality. Neither from the standpoint of the psychology of blindness nor that of social work for the blind should this fact of his individuality be overlooked. Social service workers seem prone to pour humanity by masses or groups into vats and molds, and say of a particular group, "*These* are the ill-housed" or "*These* are the blind" or "*These* are the unemployed." We honestly believe that what the Virginia Commission for the Blind constantly strives to keep in mind is that the blind of Virginia are to be dealt with as individual human personalities. So long as the Commission remains a comparatively small, independent State institution, the ideals of common-sense adaptation to individual needs will still be practicable. What many of the social psychologists seem loath to remember is that there is no predicting how a human personality will respond to a stimulus, no matter how obviously the social calculations may lead to the expected personal reaction. Social manipulators, inclined to forget the dignity of the individual man, blind or otherwise, might recall the cowboy's reaction on viewing the Grand Canyon of the Colorado. Standing for his first time on the rim of that Titanic scene in Arizona, he spit into it a sizeable reservoir of tobacco juice, and said, "Ain't that hell?"

The Diagnosis

The Virginia Commission for the Blind undertakes to "diagnose" the individual needs of those whom it was founded to serve, and then through its staff to minister to those needs as "diagnosed." As a rough analogy, we may picture a modern dental clinic. The patients are ushered into the main office of the dental diagnostician and if need be are put, each in his turn, under the X-ray. On the same floor are the offices of all the dental experts the diagnostician may require—one specializing in extractions, one in plate

making, one in bridge work, and another is an orthodontist. As for the patients, each has a trouble more or less different from all the others, but they *all* have *this one thing* in common—namely, their teeth need fixing.

The people whom the Virginia Commission for the Blind was founded to serve all have *this one thing* in common—that they are either blind or liable to become so. But that is all they do have in common. One is a child in Roanoke about to stop school on account of eye-strain,—for her the diagnostician provides a sight-saving class. One is a cultured matron recently blind from glaucoma,—for her it's the talking book. One is a graduate of the school for the blind with the asset of an engaging "gift of gab,—he is put on a candy route and makes friends for the blind as well as cash for himself.

The "diagnostician" is not any one person—not the chairman of the Commission, not Mr. Watts, not any person in particular. The diagnostician is the *Spirit* of the *Unified Work* for the Blind in Virginia. Because some of the staff are themselves blind, and because practically all of the staff have had long experience with blind people and their problems, the spirit of the organization is a feeling of friendly interest in the individual blind. As a small college can give more individual attention to the students than can a mammoth university which vomits forth graduates like clothes pins from a factory, so the Virginia Commission for the Blind, dealing with a small fraction of the population, can deal with them as the blind ought to be dealt with—in a semi-social, semi-individual manner. "The blind lead *narrower* lives, therefore, they lead *intenser* lives." To get a paying job on which to support a family is not the pressing problem of all, but it *is* for some. To be put on Aid to the Blind is not the only hope for all, but it *is* for some. A pair of glasses, or an operation for cataracts, does not mean saved vision for all, but it *does* for some. To learn Braille or crocheting or knitting in order to break the monotony of lonely hours is not a boon to all; it *is* a *balm* to some. And the Commission is quietly doing some of these things every day. All these services of the Commission radiate from its one, central purpose,—that there shall be fewer blind in Virginia, and that those, who must be so, shall come to better days.

